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NSAM Unearths Archaeological Bounty Near Lake Del Monte

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Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

NSAM Unearths Archaeological Bounty Near Lake Del Monte - Today at NPS July 2016 - Naval Postgraduate School



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Today@NPS



U.S. Navy photo by Melinda Larson

NSAM Unearths Archaeological Bounty Near Lake Del Monte

By Melinda Larson, NSAM Public Affairs

Field Technician Joy Vyhmeister uncovers a remnant of Monterey's ancient past near Lake Del Monte, June 30. Hundreds of years ago, Native Americans groups left objects like this around the shores of what is now called Lake Del Monte at Naval Support Activity Monterey.

Bones and shells found at the site lead researchers to believe the early settlers or nomads feasted on deer and abalone near the site. Members of the group also created beads using olivella shells that were present in abundance.

"We're evaluating the archaeological site to learn more about them from this midden deposit, or trash pile," said Dean Duryea, a field technician for Statistical Research, Inc.

Using hand augers to carefully survey the area in three dimensions, Duryea and three other technicians excavated about a cubic meter in two areas near the lake. The sand and debris were placed into buckets and then sifted.

"This is a bead made from an olivella shell," said Vyhmeister, as she carefully sifted through the sand looking for artifacts. "We'll be able to carbon date this bead to discover how old it is."

About 10 inches down the technicians found intact abalone shells and deer bones. As they dug to a depth of about one-meter, they were surprised to find smaller shells.

"Stratigraphically, the fact that the debris from smaller food is further down is surprising and is opposite of what you normally find in a midden [heap]," said Vyhmeister. "Normally they would've first hunted and gathered the larger abalone and deer. Once that food supply was depleted then they would've turned to the smaller species."

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With the excavation complete, the technicians estimate about two-thirds of their time on this project will be spent in a laboratory where they will sort, count and weigh the collection and prepare a report on their findings. At the end of this project, the area will be returned to its original state.

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"This is not a museum or educational site, this is our home. It is important that we document and protect archeological resources while minimizing negative impacts to Navy operations," said Vicki Taber, Installation Environmental Program Director. "The information gathered on this site is critical to installation planning and to furthering the overall understanding of prehistoric cultures. We're thrilled to be a part of this important work."

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